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Bishop Irenei of London: Challenging His Own Moscow Patriarchate on the Sacraments of Heretics

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In a recent YouTube short posted by Patristic Nectar Publications, Bishop Irenei, the ROCOR-MP Bishop of London, addresses another question concerning whether the heterodox have grace in their sacraments—once again directly contradicting the teaching of his own Moscow Patriarchate on this very issue. In this short, Bishop Irenei is quoted as saying:

One of you wrote me and put this very concisely: “I have read online that the Orthodox Church acknowledges sacraments outside of the Church as long as they meet certain criteria, is this correct?”

Well, the concise answer is no. It’s not correct, and let me explain why. A sacrament is something that, by definition, only the Church can effect. As Orthodox, we always maintain belief in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The very question—“Does the Orthodox Church regard as valid the sacraments of another Church?”—has an obvious answer: no. There can be only one Church, and the sacraments are her actions [1].

Bishop Irenei rightly teaches that the mysteries of schismatics and heretics—those outside the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church—do not possess sacramental grace. To assert that grace exists within schism and heresy is, in effect, to claim that there are two distinct kinds of sacramental grace: one belonging to the Orthodox, and another to the heterodox. Such a position would imply that Christ is present in the Eucharist of heretics and schismatics, and therefore that Christ is truly present in heretical mysteries. This, in turn, would suggest the existence of two churches—divided in doctrine, yet both equally endowed with the fullness of sacramental grace.



Bishop Irenei (Steenberg) of London, ROCOR-MP

On this very subject, Saint Philaret of New York, the former First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, wrote in a private letter to Abbess Magdalena of the Monastery of Lesna in France:

Metropolitan Anthony, handing over the abbatial staff to Abbess Pavla, said to her: “Be lenient with everyone, know how to deal with the weak in faith and the blasphemers. Deal wisely with heretics, but never agree with the idea that they somehow possess the grace of the Holy Spirit; know that Catholics, Muslims, and all other heretics are without grace.”—And we have already seen that the Holy Fathers equate the persistent and continuing schism with heresy [2].

What is noteworthy about this YouTube Short is that Bishop Irenei directly contradicts the long-standing teaching of the Moscow Patriarchate regarding the presence of grace in heretical mysteries. In his Second Sorrowful Epistle, Saint Philaret of New York observed that the Moscow Patriarchate acknowledged the mysteries of the papal heretics. On this matter, he writes:

In their common prayer in the Basilica of St. Peter, Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI stated that they find themselves already united “in the proclamation of the same Gospel, in the same baptism, in the same sacraments and the charismas” (ibid., p.660). But even if the Pope and Patriarch have declared to be null and void the Anathemas which have existed for nine centuries, does this mean that the reasons for pronouncing them, which are known to all, have ceased to exist? Does this mean that the errors of the Latins which one was required to renounce upon entering the Church no longer exist? The Roman Catholic Church with which Patriarch Athenagoras would establish liturgical communion, and with which, through the actions of Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and others, the Moscow Patriarchate has already entered into communion, is not even that same Church with which the Orthodox Church led by St. Mark of Ephesus refused to enter into a union. That church is even further away from Orthodoxy now, having introduced even more new doctrines and having accepted more and more the principles of reformation, ecumenism and modernism [3].

The well-known fact that the Moscow Patriarchate had entered into a form of Eucharistic communion with the Latin Papists is confirmed by the Patriarchate’s own decision in 1969, which formally established this relationship. Writing in The New York Times on February 21, 1970, James F. Clarity described this act of mutual sacramental recognition in his article “Russian Priests May Minister to Roman Catholics,” stating:

Moscow, Feb 20—The Russian Orthodox Church has decided to permit its priests to administer sacraments to Roman Catholics.

The full details of the decision taken by the church’s Holy Synod last month, were not available today and have not been publicized in the communications organs of this officially atheist nation. But a spokesman for the Moscow Patriarchate said the sacraments would be made available to Roman Catholics who are able to prove they have been baptized in their religion.

Sources informed on Orthodox Church affairs said the synod’s action could have a threefold effect. First, they said, it would improve relations between the Russian church and the Vatican.

Second, the decision would make it potentially easier for Roman Catholics in the Soviet Union to receive the sacraments, especially communion.

Catholic Reciprocity

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes the validity of sacraments administered to Catholics who are unable to receive them from their own priests. Also, Catholic priests are authorized to give the sacraments to Orthodox believers. The source said the extent to which Soviet Roman Catholics would be helped would depend on how strictly individual Orthodox priests enforced the requirement of proof of baptism.

The third effect of the Synod’s decision, the sources said, could be to complicate the Russian church’s relations with other Orthodox churches in the Pan-Orthodox Conference. The conference headed by Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Istanbul, attempts to coordinate the attitudes of 14 autonomous Orthodox churches. The patriarch is said to support ecumenical relations with the Vatican but there is considerable opposition to it among some Orthodox leaders.

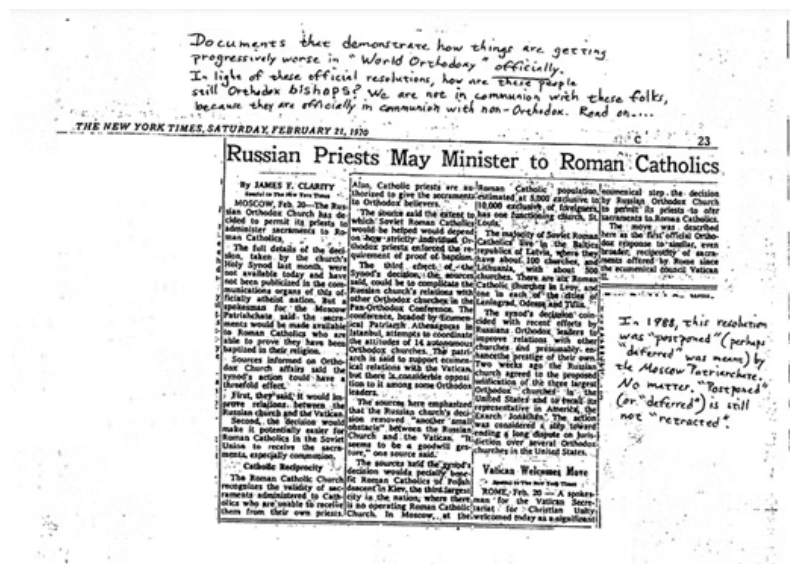
The sources here emphasized that the Russian church’s decision removed “another small obstacle” between the Russian Church and the Vatican. “It seems to be a goodwill gesture,” one source said.

The sources said the synod’s decision would especially benefit Roman Catholics of Polish descent in Kiev, the third largest city in the nation where there is no operating Roman Catholic Church. In Moscow the Roman Catholic population estimated at 5,000 exclusive to 10,000 exclusive of foreigners, has one functioning church, St. Louis. [sic]

The majority of Soviet Roman Catholics live in the Baltics, republics of Latvia where they have about 100 churches, and Lithuania with about 500 churches. There are six Roman Catholic churches in Lvoy, and one in each of the cities of Leningrad, Odessa, and Tiflis.

The synod’s decision coincided with recent efforts by Russians [sic] Orthodox leaders to improve relations with other churches and presumably enhance the prestige of their own. Two weeks ago the Russian church agreed to the proposed unification of the three largest Orthodox churches in the United States and to recall its representative in America, the Exarch Jonathan. The action was considered a step toward ending a long dispute on jurisdiction over several Orthodox churches in the United States.

Rome, Feb. 20 — A spokesman for the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity welcomed today as a significant ecumenical step the decision by [the] Russian Orthodox Church to permit its priests to offer sacraments to Roman Catholics. The move was described here as the first official Orthodox response to similar, even broader, reciprocity of sacraments offered by Rome since the ecumenical council Vatican II [4].



It is evident, even at this early stage, that the Moscow Patriarchate's recognition of the so-called mysteries of the Latin Papists was a well-known and established fact. Later in history, this trajectory continued with the heretical Balamand Declaration of 1993, signed jointly by the Roman Catholic Church together with the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch, as well as the Churches of Russia, Romania, Cyprus, Poland, Albania, and Finland. In its thirteenth article, the Balamand Declaration affirms a mutual recognition of mysteries and explicitly rejects proselytization by either side. This heretical document states:

13. In fact, especially since the panorthodox Conferences and the Second Vatican Council, the re- discovery and the giving again of proper value to the Church as communion, both on the part of Orthodox and of Catholics, has radically altered perspectives and thus attitudes. On each side it is recognized that what Christ has entrusted to his Church - profession of apostolic faith, participation in the same sacraments, above all the one priesthood celebrating the one sacrifice of Christ, the apostolic succession of bishops - cannot be considered the exclusive property of one of our Churches. In this context, it is clear that any rebaptism must be avoided [5].

In a later video, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), spokesman for the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, publicly stated on Russian state television on behalf of the Patriarchate:

"To all intents and purposes, mutual recognition of each other's Mysteries already exists between us. We do not have communion in the Mysteries, but we do recognize each other's Mysteries," declared Archbishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) on the air during a broadcast of the program 'The Church and the World' on the television channel 'Russia,' on October 17th. 'If a Roman Catholic priest converts to Orthodoxy, we receive him as a priest, and we do not re-ordain him. And that means that, de facto, we recognize the Mysteries of the Roman Catholic Church,' explained Archbishop Hilarion [6].

Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) also affirms that the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church are not in communion. However, the original communion agreements signed in the 1960s have never been formally rescinded or repudiated. Moreover, in another video, he states that, in extreme circumstances—such as imminent death—communion may still be administered to a Papist, even if the individual has rejected the True Orthodox faith throughout their life. Regarding this alleged break in communion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Vatican, Hilarion states the following:

Exceptional cases occur, when, for example, a Roman Catholic is dying in some town where there is no Roman Catholic priest at all in the vicinity. So, he asks an Orthodox priest to come. Then in such a case, I think, the Orthodox priest should go and give Communion to that person [7]

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We have multiple examples of the Soviet-created Moscow Patriarchate teaching that heretics outside the Church possess mysteries: signing official documents with the Vatican affirming this and preaching in an official capacity on Russian state television that heretics outside the Church have mysteries. Throughout the history of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, there are documented acknowledgments that the Moscow Patriarchate indeed teaches this. Yet Bishop Irenei, a hierarch of the self-subjugated ROCOR-MP, teaches something entirely different from the position of his own patriarchate. It is striking that a bishop within the subjugated jurisdiction of ROCOR-MP can openly contradict the teaching of his Patriarchal Synod and still remain in communion with this Soviet-created, graceless, and politically compromised institution.

Sacraments outside the Church? 🖱- #jesus #marriage #christian



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